

High-Risk Food Consumption, handling, and Preparation Practices of Adults in the FoodNet Sites, 1996-1997

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Various food consumption, handling and preparation practices have been linked with foodborne diseases. To determine the prevalence of these risk factors among adults, we conducted telephone interviews of persons in the FoodNet catchment area (CA, CT, GA, MN, and OR) between July 1996 and June 1997 using a random digit-dialing sampling method. Interviewees were asked about their consumption of certain foods in the five days before the interview, as well as their general knowledge, attitudes, and practices relative to food safety. Risk factors were analyzed by age group, education level, income level, race/ethnicity, and sex; significant differences were defined as <0.01 . Of the 7493 adults interviewed, 34% preferred pink hamburgers; 18% ate runny eggs, 2% ate raw shellfish, and 1.5% drank unpasteurized milk. Almost always washing hands after handling raw ground beef, and raw chicken was affirmed by 89% and 92%, respectively, and 93% of the respondents claimed they washed their cutting board after cutting raw chicken on it; 51% read safe-handling labels on packages of raw ground beef. Men were more likely than women to prefer pink hamburgers (39% v 29%), and less likely to wash their hands after handling raw ground beef (83% v 94%). Adults 18-25 years old were less likely than older persons to read labels on packages of raw ground beef (40% v 53%). Blacks were less likely than others to prefer pink hamburgers (12% v 36%). Hispanics were more likely than others to have eaten raw shellfish (7.9% v 1.8%) and to have consumed raw milk (4.9% v 1.4%). Persons with annual household incomes $\geq \$60,000$ were more likely than those with lower incomes $< \$60,000$ to prefer pink hamburgers (45% v 30%); those with at least some college education also preferred pink hamburgers more often than those with no college education (38% v 25%). Persons from California and Connecticut were more likely to have preferred pink hamburgers than those from other states (43% v 27%), and persons from Connecticut were more likely than others to have eaten raw shellfish (3.1% v 1.7%). Oregonians were more likely than others to have eaten eggs with runny yolks (23% v 16%). Although risky practices were apparent in all groups, in general, public health officials may consider focusing their food-safety educational campaigns on 18 to 25-yr-olds, men, Hispanics, and those from higher socioeconomic groups. Moreover, state-specific differences in food preferences warrant home-grown messages.

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